

BUYING HELP

INTRODUCTION

If you don't know what type of product you need, or are wondering whether or not a particular product will work with your computer, then contact *Buying Help*.

If you want to buy a new desktop or notebook computer, please provide details of how much you want to spend and the type of tasks you want your new PC to perform.

If you're looking to buy an upgrade for your computer, you need to include as much information about your current system as possible. Knowing your computer make and model, processor, amount of memory and motherboard model can help us provide more accurate advice.

Tom Royal

Our Labs Editor can recommend the best product for your specific requirements.

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Which motherboard should I buy?

Q My computer uses an Asus P4P800 motherboard. After a recent accident, one of its PCI slots has stopped working. This is annoying, as this slot contained my TV tuner card, which I use regularly.

I've already upgraded the system to contain a 3.2GHz processor and 2GB of RAM, so I don't want to replace my entire computer if I can help it. Instead, I'd like to find a new motherboard that I could use. Can you recommend a suitable Socket 478 motherboard that can run two IDE hard disks and two SATA disks? I have a budget of around £200 to spend.

K Myatt

A You shouldn't have to spend anywhere near £200 to get your computer working again. If you search www.ebuyer.com for 119412 you'll find the ASRock P4I65G motherboard. This has a Socket 478 processor socket, supports 2GB of memory and, with two IDE ports and two SATA sockets, can connect with your four hard disks. It has three PCI slots, so there should be room for your TV tuner. It costs £31 including VAT.

This motherboard would be a cheap and effective upgrade, but remember that installing any motherboard requires a considerable amount of time,

effort and care. If you have a free USB2 port, why don't you install a new external TV tuner instead? Our favourite, Freecom's DVB-T USB Stick, costs just £28 including VAT so you'll save yourself a bit of money as well as some time.

▼ You can still buy a replacement Socket 478 motherboard, but fitting an external TV tuner is simpler and cheaper



What can I do with my photos?

Q Having recently become unemployed, I've decided to travel the world. I'm taking my digital camera and I've bought a 2GB SD card so I can store lots of photos. Even with this huge card, though, I think I'm likely to run out of space. I'm also concerned that if my camera gets lost or stolen, I could lose all the pictures stored on it.

I'm planning to write a blog about my trip, so I'll be using internet cafés from time to time. Do you know of any websites that can be used to store a copy of my photos? Better still, are there any I can use to put photos into my blog easily?

Tegan Steadman

A There are several online services that allow you to upload photos using a web browser so they will be available to view online. By using

one of these, your photos will be safely stored away on a web server. Even if your camera is stolen, you'll be able to view and share your pictures and download them to edit or print later.

One of the best-known photo-sharing services is Flickr (www.flickr.com). Originally run by a small Canadian company, it's now owned by Yahoo!, so joining is particularly easy if you already have a Yahoo! ID and password. You can use Flickr for free, but if you do you can't upload more than 100MB of photos per month. If you're constantly snapping more and more pictures, this will probably prove too limiting. A Pro account costs \$25 (around £13) per year, and gives you unlimited storage and uploads. Once your photos are stored in Flickr, you can add them to your blog by clicking the 'blog this' button found above each photo.

If you don't like Flickr, there are many good alternative services. SmugMug.com has an insufferably stupid name, but its website is easy to use and it allows you to customise the way your photo pages look. It costs from \$40 (around £20) per year for unlimited photo storage. A button marked 'share photo' gives you access to links that you can use to post photos in a blog, although it's not quite as simple as Flickr's system. Other popular alternatives include www.dotphoto.com, which places an emphasis on printing photos as well as storing them, and the colourful www.zoomr.com.

Finally, not all internet cafés will have memory card readers, so don't forget to pack one, or your camera's USB cable, when you leave. If your camera uses a non-standard USB cable, it might be worth buying a cheap USB memory card reader as well, as finding a replacement cable for many cameras can be difficult.



▲ There are several services that allow you to safely store your photos on the web and add them to blogs

Help me find a photo PC

Q My PC is seven years old. I have an Epson photo scanner, an HP Deskjet 943C printer and software including Microsoft Office 2000 and Adobe Photoshop Elements 2. I want a computer suitable for making presentations of my photos of wild flowers and scenery that I can then show to small audiences. I understand that I require a portable computer and a digital projector to do this, so I'm thinking of starting again and abandoning my old PC.

I want to be able to manage my photos and print some of the best, so I need a good colour printer. I am willing to spend up to around £600 to £700 for the computer, and the same again for a projector. What would you recommend?

Violet Ashford

A We recommend Toshiba's Satellite A100 notebook, which we reviewed in last month's *Labs*. There are lots of versions, so look for the one we reviewed by searching for the part code PSAARE-03G00JEN. It costs £800, which is a little above your budget, but it's a powerful notebook with a display that shows colours accurately, making it a good choice for photography. If you already own a copy of Photoshop Elements 2, you'll be ready to start enhancing and editing your digital pictures.

Before you can buy a projector, you need to choose from one of two types. Home cinema projectors tend to have a high resolution, so they're good for showing photos with lots of detail, but they're not very bright. This makes them a poor choice if you'll be showing your pictures in brightly lit rooms. If you'll be showing

pictures in the dark, Hitachi's Illumina PJ-TX300, which we reviewed in last month's *Labs* test, is our favourite home cinema projector. It costs £814 including VAT.

If you want to show your photos in brightly lit rooms, you're better off buying an office projector. These are far brighter, and are generally small and easy to carry from place to place. If you decide to buy one, we recommend Dell's 1800MP, which was also reviewed in last month's *Labs*. It costs a little over £700 including VAT. Both the Dell and Hitachi projectors have D-sub video inputs, so they will connect to any computer with a standard VGA video output.

For printing paper copies of your photos, you'll need a good inkjet printer. Read our *Labs* review on page 88 to find out which produce the best prints.

How can I go HD?

Q I love to watch films, and I want to upgrade my home cinema system to play high-definition DVDs. I know there are currently two different types: HD DVD and Blu-ray. I've checked the range of films available for both systems and have decided to buy an HD DVD player first. If Blu-ray becomes more popular, I might also buy one of those when they become a bit cheaper.

My problem is choosing between the different players available. I was thinking about buying a Toshiba HD-E1, but a friend told me that upgrading my Xbox 360 games console would be cheaper. Is this true, and if so, how difficult is it to do? I'm not sure I'm prepared to take a screwdriver to my Xbox, as it was quite expensive.

Tony Lewis

A Your friend is correct in saying that you can upgrade your Xbox 360 to play HD DVD discs. Better still, you won't need to crack open the case of your



◀ If you already own an Xbox 360, adding an HD DVD player is simple and inexpensive

costly console. Microsoft sells an Xbox 360 HD DVD player for around £130 including VAT.

It's a separate box that connects to your console via USB and requires its own power supply. At this price, it's far cheaper than buying a separate player such as the Toshiba HD-E1. It's a particularly good choice given that there's currently no way to tell whether HD DVD or Blu-ray, or both, will become successful. If HD DVD fails, you won't have wasted much money.

Which graphics card should I fit?

Q I have a computer that uses a Microstar MS6741 microATX motherboard and an ATI Radeon 9600XT graphics card. I'd like to play Splinter Cell Double Agent and some other new games, but my graphics card isn't up to the task. Can I upgrade to a new graphics card, and which do you recommend?

Cliff McGuire

A There isn't a motherboard called the MS6741, but this identification code is sometimes used to refer to the MSI K8TM-ILSR. This is a microATX motherboard that uses a Socket 754 processor. You can find more information, and a picture to confirm it's the same model as yours, at <http://tinyurl.com/27ym7y>.

If this is your motherboard, adding a new and more powerful graphics card is easy as it has an AGP 8x slot. We recommend Sapphire's X1950 Pro AGP, which we reviewed in *What's New: Components*, *Shopper* April 2007. It costs around £150 including VAT. It ran our Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory benchmark at over 65 frames per second, so it should have no trouble with the games you want to play. **ES**



▲ Sapphire's X1950 Pro AGP is excellent value and will run the latest games

Desperately seeking Shuttle PC

Q I would like to buy the Shuttle SS21T barebones PC kit, as recommended in your *Labs* test of barebones PCs, *Shopper* April 2007. Unfortunately, I don't have internet access so I can't buy one online. Can you recommend a shop I can contact on the phone?

Robert Bell

A Several shops sell the SS21T, and many of them will sell to you over the phone as well as online. Try Scan on 08707 554747. It sells the SS21T for just under £100 including VAT.



▲ Shuttle's SS21T is an excellent barebones PC kit and costs less than £100